

York grad's play gets called names

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

Names by Larry Cox
Directed by George Luscombe.

Names, an original play by York graduate Larry Cox, premiered last Thursday at TWP Theatre in Toronto. The play deals in a unique way with an old theme—the McCarthy era inquisition in Hollywood in the early '50s. The talented troupe of six actors assumes the roles of several characters each, playing Senators on the Committee for Un-American Activities in one scene and adopting the roles of celebrities in another. Familiar names like Paul Robeson, Gary Cooper, Robert Taylor, Jose Ferrer, Zero Mostel, and Arthur Miller are all presented in the play, each subject to questioning by the committee, and most pleading their right to silence in order to avoid naming others with possible Communist Party affiliations.

The focus of the play is on Larry Parks, sensitively portrayed by Richard McKenna. Parks was something of a sensation in the late '40s with his role as Al Jolson in *The Jolson Story*, becoming an overnight success before sinking into obscurity in the wake of the McCarthy era blacklisting.

In Parks we see the youthful idealist, who had been involved at one time with the Communist Party along with fellow actors, yet refused to take his right to silence. His honest desire to co-operate with the committee (without naming names) is obvious in his early testimony. Just as obvious is the committee's complete lack of concern for Parks and his career, as they break him down and threaten him with imprisonment for contempt of court if he does not name names. Park's testimony is spliced with that of the other celebrities, each with his own approach to the committee's tactics, and most ultimately unsuccessful.

While characters like Jose Ferrer, Robert Taylor and Gary Cooper speak before the committee, McKenna revolves around the stage in black face, lip-synching Jolson songs

that fade in and out of the dialogue. As the audience gains further insight into Parks' character, the songs add an increasing amount of pathos. In the end, we see Parks as a broken man, his career ruined with the Communist slur, and his integrity destroyed by his being forced to betray others.

David Clement plays three roles in the play: Robert Taylor, Jose Ferrer, and Adolphe Menjou, who was the leader of the Hollywood anti-Communists. Clement plays Ferrer for laughs, one of the highlights of the play.

Equally good is Tom Butler, who plays the bizarre combination of Gary Cooper and Paul Robeson. It is a credit to Butler that he manages to switch from the half-serious testimony of Cooper (who says he never trusted Communists because he felt they "weren't on the level") to the fiery human rights oratory of the black Paul Robeson. Robeson seems to be the only character who escapes from testimony undefeated, thoroughly intimidating the committee while providing much of the play's moral impact.

Despite pacing problems in the first act (it's too long, despite all the character changes), the play is well-conceived and informative. One criticism: The play could have been honed down, with abbreviated appearances, or even omissions of some of the characters. Cox seems to have been unwilling to let any of his dialogue go, and the play suffers when the audience gets drowned in testimony. There is never really a clear picture of what Cox is trying to do until the second act, which is virtually flawless, and considerably shorter than act 1.

The production is also first-class, using video and voice-over to enhance the multi-media effect. One can watch the players on TV sets in the background, as well as on stage, giving one the feeling of a guest in the living rooms of 1950s America. Coupled with the Al Jolson song and dance numbers, the video emphasizes the "show trial" nature of the Hollywood hearings.

Cox and Luscombe last worked together on



Photo: MARIO SCATTOLONI

Richard McKenna in *Names*, by York graduate Larry Cox.

the 1980 Chalmers Award winner, *Mac Paps*. *Names* promises to provide continued success for the duo. Perhaps a revival of McCarthy themes as a parallel for the right-wing swing in US politics is a little premature, but one can't deny Cox's sincerity in *Names*. One gets the sense that Cox is holding up the Hollywood fiasco as warning: a reminder that injustices like the one that destroyed Larry Parks are the results of similiar anti-Communist paranoia.

Short story contest

Excalibur and Calumet College announce a jointly sponsored fiction contest. The Calumet General Meeting has generously and expediently donated \$100 through their Calumet/ CYSF Trust Fund. The prize will go to the author who not only shows the best writing ability, but who adheres to the following rules:

1. This contest is open to all currently registered York University, Atkinson College and Glendon College students, except staff members of Excalibur and their relatives;
2. All entries, to be considered for judging, must be type-written, double-spaced and WRITTEN IN PROSE; and be between 500 and 1500 words;
3. Entries must include the author's name, address, and telephone and student numbers;
4. Entries must be submitted either in person or by mail, to: Arts Editor, Excalibur, 111 Central Square, York University, 4700 Keele St., Downsview, Ontario, M3J 1P3;
5. Deadline for all entries will be Friday, December 9th at 12 o'clock noon;
6. Entries will be judged by a panel of three (to be named later);
7. The winner will be notified by telephone and the winning entry will be published in Excalibur the first week of January, 1984;
8. In the event less than 10 entries are received by the deadline date, this contest will be nullified and the \$100 returned to the Calumet/CYSF Trust Fund;
9. Excalibur Publications will not be held responsible for returning stories. Make copies.

Right Stuff contest winners

The following people win a free pass to "The Right Stuff" and their choice of a video game cassette, poster, or book:

Irene Buis, Mary Katenbusch, Christine Quarrington, Wendy Alger, Tracy Galvin, Ron Boyd, Ian Bailey, Brigham Phillips, John McLean

The following people win their choice of book, poster, or video game cassette:

Jim Martin, Madeleine Pengelly, Michael Boyce, Krista Solic, Steven Young, Graham Hyatt, Mary Quan, Kathe Sesto, Charlie Cooley, Henry Morton, John Nicklas, Mike Murley, Nick Power, Mark Singer, Fred Goyer, Rob Carrick, Joe Gaudet, David Wiechorek

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